

Exploring the Stigma of Fanboy Prints

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Abstract

There are connections interwoven in literature considering artifacts that utilize both text and visual art, such as the comic strip, the comic book, the trade paperback, and the graphic novel, and the many uses and abuses associated historically with the text/graphics genre that casual readers may overlook. While the stereotype of the comic industry may culturally convey a stigma of both the genre and the readers of the genre, it is worth considering historical circumstances that have made the stigma possible and current articles trending towards an evolution of use for the educational regime. This piece focuses on the stigma and potential evolution threads integrated in much of the comic oriented literature to date by sampling various pieces that have joined the conversation.

Considered in this piece are various articles touching on the comic strip, comic book, trade paperback, or graphic novel and their positionality on stigma associated with the genre, educational use of the genre, and how the stigma and academic use of the genre is evolving. These layers of consideration will interplay with specific areas for each article based on the article's rhetorical positioning and intended purpose, attempting to discern if the academic discussion of the genre is pointing towards an evolution in the use and acceptance of the genre or a maintained status quo that stigmatizes both the genre and the reader.

In colloquial use, the terms comic strip, comic book, trade paperback, and graphic novel are sometimes used interchangeably and often incorrectly. In contrast with that colloquial use, I will use the phrase "fanboy prints" to combine those four mediums under one phrasing to show the inclusion of each text/graphic style into this piece and in efforts to reclaim a term, fanboy, that has tried to label many of us for years.

Keywords: comics, comic strip, comic books, graphic novels, visual literacy, reluctant readers, struggling readers, fanboy art, stigma

Introduction

The thing I remember the most was the way he looked at me. For the first time in any of our classes together, I saw vulnerability in his eyes. He asked me if I read this stuff as he showed me a copy of the *Watchmen* graphic novel. I told him I did and that the one he was holding was one of my favorites. I sensed apprehension from him so I started to talk a bit about the graphic novel to show him that I was being authentic. I shared my favorite plot twists, character developments, etc. and he slowly allowed his apprehension to dissolve. He had struggled through both English classes he had taken with me, due to what he shrugged off as a dislike of reading, but I realized at that moment - as we discussed the story in detail - he liked to read, and read well, if what he read mattered to him. When he shared his thoughts, "*This was, like, the coolest story I've ever read,*" what was important was that they were *his* thoughts about something he really engaged with.

For some reason, this was the scene that came to mind when the principal of the high school where I taught told me that I had to lock my cupboards and stop allowing students to borrow books from my classroom library, at least until the investigation was over. I couldn't grasp his explanation. Apparently some secretary in some administrative office was processing a receipt from months ago, a receipt that linked to a grant I had written for classroom library funding. I had received a number of grants in my time at the high school and had agreements in place with local book stores who would give discounts, match our spending, or allow students in my classes, who stopped into the store, coupons for free books. My students could stop into the bookstores or my classroom and add titles to our wishlist, and then every so often we'd have a shipment delivered to our classroom. But now, a secretary called a receipt into question so my cupboards were being locked. I couldn't quite follow the story arc through the fog in my head. My classroom library, built over the years from student input, was a source of joy for me and my students.

I learned long ago that the best way to find out what students should be reading is to ask them. We had a system for deciding appropriateness that was *somewhat* flexible. If there was questionable content involved with the book, I'd read it and discuss the content with my students. If a book dealt with suicide, rape, violence, etc. the students would be tasked with explaining why the reality of those messages mattered, and then find a link in a classical canon text (i.e. suicide in a contemporary novel would link to the suicide in *Romeo & Juliet*, in efforts to show texts that were already approved with the same topicality).

As I locked the cupboards that afternoon, with the Principal explaining it was the Superintendent's call, I was disappointed in our bureaucracy. It seems the secretary recording the

paperwork and receipt from my grant was skimming the titles on the list and was shocked by a few words she stumbled upon. She spoke with the Superintendent about the list and shared her disapproval of the titles. The Superintendent called the Principal and called for all the books to be locked up until this matter was fully investigated. Questions were asked: Why would you have such vulgar books on your shelves? Why would you let students read these books? What were you thinking? My answers that attempted to explain, teach, and share were ignored, repeatedly - so I asked a question of my own: Did you read the book? No. The answer was no from the secretary and no from all administrators involved. No. It seems no one complaining had read any of the books they deemed offensive. There were a few books that dealt with teen depression and suicide that had versions of *Loving Yourself* or *Self Love* in the title and a comment was made that masturbation books were not appropriate. *Masturbation?* Even though I explained they were about self-esteem, not self-pleasure, my responses were ignored. As they went through the list, picking at and misconstruing titles, they stumbled on a number of comic books and graphic novels on the list. *What kind of idiot would have high school seniors reading comic strips in class?* It didn't seem the best time to point out the differences in comic strips and graphic novels, so I continued to take note. At some point, as I listened to complaints and accusations, I realized that there was a great divide between what my students enjoyed reading and looked at as important reading for their lives and what the administrators seemed to think students should read, based on titles and genre only. Without unpacking the drama of the next few weeks, I'll move forward to the end of the incident. I had to justify my choices for a number of books, books that weren't being required - only shared and then explain how I shared my classroom library policies with the parents of my students. The sheet I sent home for parents shared contact info, prep hours, a link to the American Library Association's (ALA) website and this message:

Please communicate with me if there is a title, topic, author, or genre you would like your student to abstain from reading. You are welcome into my classroom to peruse the classroom library at your convenience. In the event your son or daughter comes home with a book that you do not approve of, simply retrieve the book from them, contact me, and I will make arrangements to collect the book from you.

I had never had a parent contact me asking for items to be removed or withheld - although I did have a number of parents donate items to our collection.

The *100 Most Commonly Banned and Challenged Books* on the ALA's website was a place where many of the more risqué pieces in my library came from. However, while my classroom library had 43 of those titles, they were not challenged or banned. There is a subtle irony in detail that these pieces were

overlooked while a number of other books were challenged based on their style or genre. So much for the cliché that you can't judge a book by its cover. It doesn't seem too far stretched to point out that a possible reason that none of ALA commonly challenged books raised an alarm to these administrative versions of Bradbury's *Firemen* is that they weren't looked at closely because the titles and genre seemed safe. In the end, only six books (of the thousand or so) were banned from my shelves. However, all of the graphic novels in my classroom library were deemed inappropriate. When I asked if any of the administrators involved had read any of the items that were being withheld, my question was deemed irrelevant and left unanswered. Translation: *No*.

You may be asking yourself what books were banned from the shelves: I leave that detail out on purpose. Realize that I knew the collection had material in it that was not intended for *Dora the Explorer* readers. I was teaching reading strategies to juniors and seniors in high school, to both struggling and college prep readers. Books like *The Kite Runner*, which shares a scene wherein a 12 year old boy rapes a 10 year old boy, were in the collection because of their complex messages and ability to connect with a high school audience. Of course, *The Kite Runner* was ignored because the title didn't seem blasphemous and it had won various awards. The books that were pulled weren't as scandalous as many of the books that were allowed. However, the fact that all of the graphic novels (and the few comic books) in the collection were pulled from my shelves and deemed unsuitable made me wonder why the genre wasn't appropriate for the high school classroom. Struggling readers in my classes were connecting with the graphic novels. Strong readers, however, were connecting with the pieces *too*. That day, my students and I lost graphic novels in one fell swoop. We lost: *Maus*, *Maus II*, *Beowulf*, *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, *Pride of Baghdad*, as well as nearly 50 other graphic novels simply because their *genre* was deemed inappropriate. As I remember these events, I feel much the same now as I did then - I'm disappointed that I rolled over, as a not yet tenured teacher, and allowed the items to be removed from the collection. Actually, disappointed may not send the right message ... I'm mad as hell, unequivocally biased, and ashamed of the people involved. Thus, this piece focuses on the following inquiry: Does the comic/graphic genre carry with it a stigma ("then" or "now") that blocks its entrance into academia? Is there an evolution of status occurring in the genre due to the growing connection of text/image via the Internet and the need for visual literacy? Can academia find use and thus help add credibility to the genre? And somewhere in my thoughts there is a faint echo ... *This was, like, the coolest story I've ever read*.

Considering Stigma Literature: What kind of idiot would have high school seniors reading comic strips in class?

In his article, "Culture and Stigma: Popular Culture and the Case of Comic Books," Lopes (2006), explains that due to various factors associated with the genre, "The male comic book fans that frequented [comic] specialty shops soon found themselves labeled as 'fanboys'" (p. 405). It is that term, fanboy, that I will use to collect the comic strip (from the local newspapers), the comic book (the often monthly ongoing serial story), the trade paperback (a collection of comic books that entails a certain story arc bound together in one binding), and graphic novel (a stand alone story outside the arc of serial comics that looks like a trade paperback) into one genre that I will address in this paper as the fanboy prints.

Initial consideration of a stigma that permeates the fanboy prints starts with the assumption that fanboy works are childish or simplistic, if not detested outright. As Tabachnick (2007) shares in his article, "A Comic-Book World," the fanboy pieces are often held up as the reason for a host of problems connected to young people: "At best, they have been seen as a childish diversion and, at worst, as texts that deaden intellect and moral reasoning, linked with juvenile delinquency and a host of other social ills surrounding young people" (Wertham, 1953, as cited in Tabachnick, 2007, p. 50). Partially, the reasoning associated with the intellectual lack in the fanboy prints is their association with being childish in their expectation of imagination, one of the "host of problems" aforementioned. The logic of the classic novel, per se, "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 10) versus the impassioned daydreaming of adventures, tights, and capes, "Meanwhile -- Far away at the north pole, an odd sky-ship slants downward toward Santa Claus' big toy factory!" (Siegel, 1940, p. 4). Since the characters often have unrealistic powers and expectations, the line of possible/impossible blurs for readers (Tabachnick, 2007, Lopes, 2006). Thus, the childish nature of the work, long held as a societal stigma, begins to impact the social identity of the readers. If the fanboy prints are infantile then those who read them *must* be infantile too. Readers who enjoy work in the fanboy prints begin being seen as, or feeling like some type of outcast, another "host of problems" item. It may not be long until the reader who feels like an outcast then believes the social verdict and wears the outcast "social ill" label. "Most people, and when I say people I mean women, consider comic book readers dirty, overweight, acne ridden, and immature geek perverts" (A Fanboy on the iFanboy website as cited in Lopes, 2006). However, I admit that some fanboys may orient towards the medium because of the outcast nature itself. Although, this piece will not explore the differentiation of the fanboy who chooses said outcast label and the ones who do not.

As Lopes (2006) shares from Goffman's *Stigma* (1963), "A stigmatized person's social identity is discredited by the power of a single attribute, such as being visually impaired or a drug user" (p. 387). However, it's interesting to note that Goffman's position that stigma had no relation to what a person, a fanboy for our consideration, was capable of being, but instead saw stigma as a social construction (Lopes, 2006). In essence, the social construction of the fanboy's social identity is discredited due to their behavior of reading fanboy work (Jensen, 2001 as cited in Lopes, 2006).

In the article, "Adult Fans of Comic Books: What They Get out of Reading," Botzakis (2009) explains the discredited social identity accompaniment in another way: "When people think of comic-book readers, they typically get a vision of a stunted person who lives in his parents' basement and spends countless hours arguing the minutiae of his particular popular culture interests" (p. 50). Part of the explanation for Botzakis is the infantilizing words, such as Batman's "Pow!" or "Bam!" - sound effects, associated with the genre. While Botzakis' (2009) painting of the fanboy as childish seems altogether different from Lopes' iFanboy (2006) overweight pervert framing, both show the fanboy as the unaccepted social deviant, albeit for different reasons. This deviant portrayal is representative of how fanboy prints themselves have been looked upon in the United States for many decades (Botzakis, 2009).

However, not all scholars agree on the infantilizing of the fanboy prints as a prime source of disapproval. Gallo & Weiner (2004) point to an opposite end of the spectrum in the history of one particular area of the fanboy prints, the graphic novel: "There was a time when calling a novel graphic meant the book was either sexually explicit or filled with gore, or both" (Gallo & Weiner, 2004, p. 114). While considering the opposite points of what has aided the stigma associated with the fanboy form, it seems important not to miss that whether it was infantilizing *or* sexually explicit, the genre was still being stigmatized for its *content*. Opportunity, it seems, crafted strange bedfellows. On the one side, detractors pointing at the childish nature of work were somehow aligned with detractors from the other side, pointing at the perverted or obscene nature of the work. And we haven't even considered the stigma carried by the comic artists themselves; artists whom the Germans called an *Untermensch*, a subhuman (Lopes, 2006, p. 404). Thus, the stigmatized content that Lopes (2006), Gallo & Weiner (2004), and Botzakis (2009) all seem to point towards casts an impression that that *all fanboy prints* work is considered in the same light, even if for radically different - to the point of being opposites at times - reasons. At some point, wouldn't judging all written text based on a singular Stephen King or Danielle Steele novel seem overzealous? This point is regarded in the Bucher & Manning (2004) article, "Bringing Graphic Novels into a School's Curriculum." "Too often educators exclude graphic

novels solely because of the format or the erroneous impression that all graphic novels focus on supernatural horror stories or are expressions of the male power fantasy [etc.]" (Bucher & Manning , 2004, p. 68,). The effect of this stigma on the genre and readers is then one of discrediting and a formation of a notion of deviance and a threat to the social order (Lopes, 2006, Tabachnick, 2007, Dardess, 1995, Berkowitz & Packer, 2001). This often leads to a divide between fanboys and more cultured members of society. The *Untermensch*, garnering a lowered, deviant status.

In his article, "Bringing Comic Books to Class," Dardess (1995) considers the uphill climb that alternative art forms often have to undergo to gain acceptance and credibility. However, as Dardess points out:

The comic strip has been met with indifference and even at times with fear and hostility from higher, more educated groups. Yet while other [art] forms with lowly origins have been able to bridge the gulf between classes and to invigorate artistic expression on the highest levels, the comic strip has not been able to do so. (1995, p. 216)

If what Dardess presents is considered, it stands to reason this may be why the genre has been unable to unshackle itself from the stigma. One theory is that institutions with cultural authority, like schools for example, haven't accepted the genre as legitimate, even though there is a wide range of quality in the fanboy prints (Dardess, 1995, Lopes, 2006, Griffith, 2010). Thus, while the institutions discriminate against the genre, adding fuel to the associated notion of stigma, they are also unknowingly allowing the fanboys an ownership over their interest and connection to the genre in which the institution then cannot fully comprehend. As Tabachnick (2007) finds:

At the same time, however, reading practices are not just accepted indiscriminately from authoritative institutions. Individuals are capable of finding ways to navigate their worlds by using texts, objects, and situations to their advantage. Foucault ... acknowledged that institutions discipline individuals but that individuals could find spaces to gain their own advantages [learning from their activity], de Certeau ... referred to such actions as tactics, and he detailed how reading is an activity that encourages people to "poach" ideas or beliefs from texts and use them to gain advantages [this may be easier if fanboys were battling super powered alien monsters, instead of a society convinced it is in the right]. Jenkins ... applied this concept of poaching in his study of media fans and found that texts are often used in ways that their producers do not intend. (p. 52)

Thus, while fanboys may be able to look danger in the eye and leap tall buildings in a single bound, the best idea they may poach from the genre due to the associated stigma is that of the secret

identity. It seems that cultural conveyance of the stigma, while aided in the framework of educational institutions historical disdain from the fanboy prints -- if not simply the inability or unwillingness to allow them space in the classroom -- began to grow in its own depiction of the fanboy industry as less than literature and less than art (Lopes, 2006, Griffith, 2010, Hassett & Schieble, 2007). It is argued that as critics continue to vilify the fanboy prints as a subliterate distraction that would be harmful to student imaginations -- if not act as a hindrance to more traditional comprehension measures - - they inadvertently vilify the readers [or teachers who promote the reading] of the genre as being irrational, unintelligent, immature, immoral, violent, and unsociable -- apparently, Mr. Superintendent, we've found the type of *idiot* in question (Lopes, 2006, p. 396, Nyberg, 1998, as cited in Lopes, 2006, p. 401, Berkowitz & Packer, 2001, Liu, 2004). As Meskin implores in the article "Defining Comics" (2007), "Establishing the existence of artistic pictorial narrative prior to the nineteenth century might seem to offer a way to establish the art status of comics, but comics have earned the right to be considered art on their own merits ... We should get on with the business of thinking seriously about comics as art. Let's get beyond the definitional project" (p.376). And so we shall...

Considering Evolution Literature: Pop cultures work at redefining what's cool.

As the cliché goes, you can't judge a book by its cover. This phrasing, it seems, may work as the motto for the evolution of fanboy prints. As society gradually moves forward towards tomorrow, it would be a hard sell to say that visuals do not play a role in daily life. Recently, as I shared a YouTube clip with my students in class, I saw students using their laptops and cell phones to share the clip with others via email, Twitter, or Facebook. *Can you hear me now? Good.* Society no longer moves, shares, and sees at a "dial-up" pace. Related to this advancement is a very gradual shift in streamlining communication. For example, if I felt so inclined, I could work on reducing this piece to the 140 characters available in a tweet. Then, perhaps a more in-depth field report in the 420 characters available for a Facebook status. People could read them while fast-forwarding through commercials on their Tivo. These advancements, if it is right they should be called such, have affected communication in a manner that makes instantaneous, quick, focused interaction more important than intimate, complex, slower interactions. Tabachnick (2004) explains, "The graphic novel gives us the subtlety and intimacy we get from good literary books while providing the speed of apprehension and the excitingly scrambled, hybrid reading experience we get from watching, say, computer screens that are full of visuals as well as text" (p.25) The point? Society has gradually moved towards a faster pace in communication and employs technological advances to aid with that pace. However, one of the most

surprising aspects of this move *forward* has been our move *backwards* (historically) towards the use of visuals as an effective medium of communication.

In the seminal piece, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud (1993) gives a historical account of the fanboy prints and explores frameworks that paved the way for the medium. McCloud crafts a definition for comic art in general, including, but not limited to our fanboy prints, over the course of many pages in his piece. The summation of his considerations presents the following definition of comic art, "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader" (McCloud, 1993, p. 20). While the definition may seem a bit wordy, it shares an overarching consideration that fanboy prints can reside under. Interestingly, McCloud points back in time to various methods, mediums, and features of communication that frame the beginning of the fanboy print style in his work (1993). Based on McCloud's definition, and his various interpretations and inclusions of the art form, this would mean that fanboy prints have been around for over 3,000 years. As McCloud points out, items such as Egyptian tomb paintings, hieroglyphics, the Norman conquest pictorial record (the Bayeux tapestry), or even the pictorial manuscripts found by Cortez in the early 1500's have utilized sequenced pictorial art to convey messages effectively (and historically) as a visual medium (1993). However, when analyzing McCloud's definition further, the scope of what falls under the umbrella of comic, moving outside of our fanboy prints momentarily, adds a number of visual forms people may not consider as a sequential message. "From stained glass windows showing biblical scenes in order to Monet's series painting, to your own car owner's manual, comics turn up all over when sequential art is employed as a definition" (McCloud, 1993, p.20). One of the reasons it is important to consider McCloud's framework is that much of the literature surrounding fanboy prints points to his definition as a foundation for the field. It is from this foundation that literature begins to glimpse the current evolution of the medium(s).

My personal narrative from earlier -- locked cupboards and disapproval -- notwithstanding, there seems to be a growth in the acceptance and use of fanboy print today, *even* in education (Schwartz, 2002, Chun, 2009, Goreman, 2003, Wolk, 2007, Versaci, 2001). The exact cause of this growth is uncertain. Some literature considers an increase in critical analysis in the classroom as an indicant of fanboy print acceptance (McVicker, 1993, Dardess, 1995, Botzakis, 2009). Other pieces of literature point towards a gradual increase in visual nature of society via indicants such as an increase in television use, the onset and increase in Internet use, or symbols (pictographs, semiotics, etc.) helping to bridge language barriers from word to illustrative symbol in a world engaged in global communication (Gallow & Weiner, 2004, Dardess, 1995, Bucher & Manning, 2004, Botzakis, 2009, Chun, 2009, Schwartz,

2006).

In the article “Comic Strips as a Text Structure for Learning to Read”, McVicker (2007) explains, “Comic images [our fanboy prints] enhance and extend the text communication. They attract the attention of the reader and create understanding of unknown factors in the text's language. It is clear that visual literacy skills assist literacy development, maintenance, and comprehension of text” (p. 85). Thus, what McVicker considers is the utilization of visual literacy skills -- skills that seem quite important in the *visual* society of the 21st century but that have long been important to readers of fanboy prints. This idea is echoed by Bucher & Manning (2004) when they propose that, “This correlation of words and illustrations is crucial because the art as well as the text must be ‘read’” (p. 68). Reading the art is the key for fanboy prints utilization, especially in the classroom as a tool of visual literacy improvement, and to comprehend the evolution of the fanboy prints as artifacts within their own field and medium.

Please remember, the goal of this piece is not to argue that society is *becoming* more visual, but instead, rests on the common knowledge that visuals are more widely utilized than ever before based on factors such as the availability of various Internet resources (think YouTube), television availability (24/7 and in various public locales), advertising (the golden arches of the McDonald's “M” having global recognition), and so on. Also, there is not an argument here that members of society are more critically or visually literate -- we may not be -- only a statement that the amount of visuals we are exposed to has steadily increased. Since visuals are more widely utilized and available than ever before it stands to reason that there is a strong need for visual literacy to assist in the decoding of the visual messages. Consider, as a child, I never saw a cell phone, Facebook profile, an email, etc. but many people today are immersed in these visuals. Thus, at this juncture, it may do well to share a common definition of visual literacy before moving forward. I choose to use McVicker's (2007) consideration. “This leads to the use of visual literacy for teaching and learning. Visual literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and, at the same time, having and integrating other sensory experiences” (p. 85).

In exploring McVickers (2007) description of visual literacy, a key part of the selection and utilization for the common definition for this piece was the inclusion of the human being's experiences. These experiences, often different from fanboy to fanboy, show that with different readers, thinkers, writers, fans... we deal with a multitude of events that frame the background of the person. Thus, some educators promote a multiliteracy approach for today's needs (Chun, 2009, Morgan & Ramanatha, 2005). The tools for such an approach, the fanboy prints, can be used to help develop these literacies.

“Graphic novels like *Maus*, *Barefoot Gen*, and *Persepolis*, about seminal events in the not-so-distant past, can mediate these historical realities with their unique visual narrative styles that allow many readers, especially adolescent ones, to imagine and interpret characters' experiences that are far removed from their own daily lives” (Chun, 2009, p. 146).

While Chun (2009) believes the stories held within the fanboy prints are removed from the lives of many readers, the point remains that the stylistic choices of the artists may seem unrealistic, perhaps a remnant from the content based stigma considered earlier in this piece, but the fanboy prints have been, and continue to be, a medium that is evolving. It is the evolution of the form that begins to cast off the historical stigmas. Dardess (1995) explains, “...the centuries-old barrier between the comic strip and respectability, while still intact, shows signs of crumbling” (p. 216). It may be that while fanboy prints have steadily evolved as an art form and communicative tool, the speed with which society itself has evolved into a more visually dependent animal has finally brought the two (society and fanboy prints) into a parallel course. “We see more and more evidence that visual learning, stimulated by developments in computer and communications technology, will play a dominant role in people's understanding of themselves and of their own and each other's cultures. Such an emphasis is likely not merely to challenge the centuries-old prejudice against the sequential art narrative, but to overwhelm it.” (Dardess, 1995, p. 217). As a novice teacher years ago, I walked into Dardess's statement head on in terms of people's understanding of themselves and the cultures surrounding them. I emphatically debated an administration's decision to ban *Huck Finn* from our American Literature courses with various colleagues and administrators. When I questioned the merits of teaching American Literature without Twain an administrator told me, assuming that I was unaware, that *Huck Finn* was banned in the era it was written also - so that this choice wasn't too radical. When I asked if the speaker knew why the piece was banned during the era it was written in his wide-eyes conveyed an answer of no. As I explained the historical banning related to a young white boy's friendship with an adult black man within the book, I asked if that was still the issue for the administration today. It was not. One administrator asked me, almost politely, if I knew the book used the “n-word”. My response was completely lost on her when I said, “I'm not afraid to say Voldemort if it will help our students learn he's evil.” The point here is that the battles educators all too often face remain the same - only the reason for battling changes. Ban the book because it shows an inter-racial friendship... or years later ban the book because it uses a racial slur. Ban the fanboy prints because they're too sexual, too grotesque, too infantile... or ban them because they're part of the a-word (art) or the f-word (fun). Either way, those casting the stigma often fail to consider the fanboys and their culture often crave an interest and

intimacy that transcends text-based literacy and comprehension. “The format of comics combines the appeal of words and pictures. A well-done graphic novel offers the immediacy of the prose reading experience, with the pictures and the words working simultaneously, making a graphic novel not only something one reads but something one sees as well, like reading and watching a movie at the same time” (Gallo & Weiner, 2004, p. 115).

The question remains, how are the fanboy prints evolving. Well, a keen look at fanboy prints shows that they are utilizing far less text today than ever before. The amount of words decreases as the graphic art is more able to carry the message to the reader -- as well as having readers who are more readily able to decode the complex visuals being utilized in the fanboy prints. However, a more important aspect of the evolution of the medium may in fact be how culture itself is evolving its view on the fanboy prints and if that evolving view will continue. This, it seems, is the crux of Tabachnick’s (2004) question, “Is this recent popularity of the graphic novel in Hollywood, with prize and museum committees, on campuses and, it must be added, in chain bookstores, an instant trend that will soon pass, or does it point to a deeper, more lasting shift in our culture?” (p. 24). The question begs to be considered. If the visual aspects of society itself are seen as having more substance than a mere trend, then shouldn’t the popularity of visual mediums, like our fanboy prints, follow suit?

Conclusion: Up, Up, & Away

Fanboy prints have maintained an integrity and readership during decades of hostility and subjugation towards the medium and the readers. However, it seems, they are slowly gaining their due place as a valuable form in the battle of interest and education. Although, the stigma associated with fanboy prints in the past often haunts them today. This does not deter the fanboy readership. When grown men will debate questions like, “Who is stronger, Hulk or Thor?” in a public setting, what hope has society of making them feel “sub-human” for simply having passion in a hobby? Meanwhile, society advances to a point where communicating with, through, and in visuals becomes trendy. Of course, this leads to a question for another time and another place: is the advancing trend of society to popularize fanboy print content for marketing purposes acting as a kryptonite for die-hard fanboys? Is the mainstreaming of the fanboy prints bringing a disharmony to the culture and context associated with avid comic readers? We’ll find out next week: *same Bat-time, same Bat-channel*.

It’s a Saturday afternoon in early December and I’ll pause to thank the fates for being in the right place at the right time or the wrong place at the wrong time depending upon your view. (A slight nod to the skies...) I stand in the graphic novel section of a mid-Michigan Barnes & Noble, looking

at their stock. A store clerk approaches with two elderly women following in tow. The clerk deposits the women in the graphic novel section and offers a happy, "Here you go," before she bounds away. The women are out of place. They look at the titles with apprehension and distaste. "What do we do?" one of them asks. The other woman simply shakes her head in response. At 6'3", 330 pounds, and sporting a grizzly beard for the Michigan winter, I realize I too am a strange site in this section. I put on my best, "I won't kill you" smile and approached the women. I asked if there was a chance I could offer them some help. No... I don't work here. I just love comics. Why? They're a fantastic piece of work. Word and picture combining to becoming *reading art*. It's like combining the best elements of Whitman, Frost, and Twain with the best elements of Michelangelo, Da Vinci, and Dali. Who are they? Some superheroes I know. They looked at me as if I had some sort of head trauma. Your granddaughter? Fifteen years old. She likes comics. But, you don't know why... No, they aren't filthy anymore. That's a different section - I could show you (*smile). *The joke was lost*. She likes that "oriental" stuff. *sigh... Well, the Manga is right here behind us. Does she have a favorite title? You have no idea. No, this isn't just boy stuff. Yes, many girls read comics too. Research shows that a high number of girls connect with Manga. No, Manga... Japanese art. No, not church, re-search. Oh, she doesn't go to church... she's a lesbian... .. No, I'm not sure which title would best suit a teenage lesbian *girl*. Maybe *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*? (*Forgive me.*) No, I don't read much Manga. Why? It's just not my drink of choice. No, I don't drink often. Well, I know that a few of my past female students read *Naruto*. Hmm? Yes. Teacher, that's right. Surprises me too. Why not try this one... Yes, I guess nine dollars is a bit pricey for "some book". No, I don't think it's too trashy for her. Oh? They were all "trampy" when you were young? Waste of paper? Just filthy sex. Sinful, eh? You don't say. I would never have imagined that. Oh, you think the drawing still looks a lot like it did back then, eh? *And how do you know what all that trashy, trampy, sinful, filthy sex stuff was drawn like?*

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